WOMAN CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONER TELLS OF SUCCESS

Mrs. Helen H. Gardner, the First of Her Sex to Hold This High Federal Office, Says, "Do Whatever You're Most Interested in to the Limit of Your Capacity"—By Margaret Crahan Jones

Mrs. Gardener taking oath of office administered by John T. Doyle, secretary of the commission. Secretary and Mrs. Daniels stand behind her

This woman brings a woman's viewpoint to the problems of 300,000 women in the civil service

"DO WHATEVER you're most interested in to the limit of your capacity."

This very pleasant formula for success sounds contrary to all the customary rules for hard work and no play, but it has brought its exponent, Mrs. Helen H. Gardener, to the highest position in the United States Government which has ever been held by a woman.

Mrs. Gardener recently was appointed to the United States Civil Service Commission, the largest employer in the world. She is one of three on the commission, and for the first time the gold letters over one of the doors, "Commissioner Gardener," trace the name of a woman.

When Mrs. Gardener is pointed out to people on the streets of Washington as the first woman civil service commissioner, the usual exclamation of the observer is, "What a little woman for such a big job!" But that is because they are of the younger generation and are not familiar with a name which is recognized by the older medical men, literary lights and "just folks" everywhere.

TO BE sure, when one enters the room of Commissioner Gardener one is greeted by a very tiny lady, who, when she sits at her desk, has to use a hassock because her feet won't touch the floor. It takes a very important little person to impress the interviewer with a great sense of capability. Yet Mrs. Gardener gives that impression without any effort on her part.

She is a little pink apple blossom of a woman. Her cheeks are delicately flushed, but her finely carved features have the stamp of character and determination which causes the casual passerby to mark her as a woman of achievement. Her hair is white and waves over her temples in charming little scallops. Her very steadfast brown eyes are remarkable not only for their expression, a seeming to see not only little things that most people overlook but also very big things far off that most eyes would never search for, but for their coloring, which is in delightful contrast to her white hair and pink skin. She is just the type a miniature painter would select, only, perhaps, with an air of a little less incapable softness and a little more practicality.

Mrs. Gardener's axiom about doing what one likes best to do might not lead to a life of achievement for every one who followed her instructions, because few, like Mrs. Gardener, prefer working for the advancement of humanity to any other occupation in the world. Mrs. Gardener would not thus describe her life work, but the men and women who have read her books, those who have heard her eloquent pleas from the lecture platform and those who know of her sincere campaign to get governmental self-expression for women through suffrage work would approve the term.

When Mrs. Gardener was quite a young woman residing in New York city, where she spent twenty-six years of her life, she began her work for the general welfare.

At that time education for women was not generally believed in. Women were not admitted to the leading colleges of the country and most of them were not given even a high school education. When a few far-sighted persons began discussing the matter of giving women the same educational opportunities as were offered men, many smug pedagogues declared that a higher education would be wasted on women because they were not capable of the same mental processes as men. Woman's brain was smaller than man's, they said.

She believed in a higher education for both sexes and desided to refute the propaganda about woman's brain. She began to study under Dr. Edward Spitska, of New York, then one of the leading brain specialists of the world. She devoted months to intensive study of the human brain and its functions. When her mentor pronounced her capable she began writing her answer, "Sex in Brain." The book was translated into eight different languages and was considered the most revolutionary work on the subject of comparison of the brains of the sexes that had been published. Doctor Spitska and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote Mrs. Gardener letters when the book appeared commending her scientific discussion.

Her second book was written as a plea for a single standard for morality for the sexes. She put her argument in the form of a novel, which caused a tremendous sensation. The book went through fifty editions.

"I always wrote my arguments in the form of novels," she explained, "as this form of writing furnishes imagination for those who have none. Few persons will read essays or abstract discussions."

Later Mrs. Gardener wrote other novels and stories, each dealing with some problem she considered vital. Her works were not the sort with a moral. She told the story and let the reader draw his own conclusions.

At one time she was particularly interested in heredity, and again she took up study of the brain and hereditary traits.

"I make no claim to being a person with a knowledge of science," Mrs. Gardener said in speaking of her writing on scientific subjects, "but I never allowed a book to be published unless I was absolutely certain that it was scientifically correct, always submitting my books to experts before they went to press, just as I always submitted books containing legal references to lawyers."

Although Mrs. Gardener did not pose as an anthropologist or sociologist, she was hailed as such when she went abroad. Medical men and scientists everywhere in Europe then asked her to address their groups.

She spent six years abroad and lived in twelve different countries.

"It was natural that my previous interests should lead me to take up suffrage work," Mrs. Gardener said.

She became one of the leaders of the National Woman's Suffrage Association and held the office of vice president. She was known by the other officers of the association as the "diplomatic corps," because of her shrewd counsel and farsightedness. Suffrage women say that she is still the adviser to whom presidents of the suffrage organization, now the National League of Women Voters, naturally turn.

"My appointment to the Civil Service Commission was a great surprise," she said. "Of course I had lived in Washington off and on for years, and because of my activities I had a fairly wide acquaintance 'up on the hill.'"

When she was asked why she thought a woman member of the Civil Service Commission would be valuable she smiled broadly.

"Don't women have special problems in any line?" she asked. "Wouldn't a woman's viewpoint be valuable where approximately half of the civil service employes, almost 700,000 in all, are women?"

One recalls that the United States army, by comparison with the civil service, has only 280,000 personnel.

"It is proper that men and women should work together to make the laws and to carry out their provisions," Mrs. Gardener said. "The government is just housekeeping on a large scale. In the home it takes both the mother and the father to make laws for the household; the same is true in government."

Although she did not dream years ago what her work would be today, all her previous activities have been training for what is needed in her present position. She has to meet and judge numbers of persons every day, and thus her study of alienation is invaluable. She has to use diplomacy, as every person in a high government position does. Her contact with legislators has given her the tact she needs. She must impress groups of persons when she addresses them. Her training in giving university extension lecture courses on sociology, work which she engaged in upon her return from abroad, makes it easy for her to drive home a message from the platform.

"I love my present work and find it, oh, so interesting," she said. "I like it so much that I have given up virtually all recreation until I 'learn the ropes.' I have declined all invitations to social affairs."

And perhaps the most significant fact that she is the right person for her responsible position is the attitude of Commissioner Wales, who has been a member of the commission twenty-five years.

"We have never been so happy in our work as since Mrs. Gardener has been with us," is the way he expresses his approval.

She Rediscovered Rag Rugs

By Mary Harrod Northend

IT WAS while hunting for an abandoned farmhouse that could be made habitable for a summer abode that Helen R. Albee found one in the foothills of New Hampshire. Here she founded her summer home, spending her winters in Washington. Surrounding the house she laid out her garden, which is now one of the most charming in the region; but in it is never allowed a flower to be picked, for sentimentally she has a feeling that they are like children, thus making it almost a crime to do so; not realizing, probably, how much better it is for the health and growth of the plants to remove the surplus blossoms.

Mingling familiarly with her neighbors, her attention is attracted to the homely, crude patterns which were pulled into the rugs which were used on the floor. These were made, as was the fashion in the olden time, out of odd pieces of old cloth, cast-off clothing, or anything that could be utilized into braiding and pulling.

The idea came to her: Why not teach my neighbors how to do their work artistically? It took no more time than it did to conceive these unattractive yet long-lived monstrosities. In order to do this she was unwilling to lend a helping hand until she had first tried out methods and patterns herself, going to nature for assistance.

These people were awaiting unbeknown the coming of a trained artist or an experienced craftsman who would teach them handicraft in the making of their rugs, and in this way they would be fully as durable and much more attractive.

For months, as she expressed it, she "played and coquetted with the industry theory," drawing patterns which she colored in water or oil, studying the forest and wayside that they might yield up their secrets, bringing home bits of the crimson thyrsus of the sumac goldenrod, and ferns that showed a cinnamon brown. In her laboratory she reveled in color as never before, finding combinations that filled her with despair, preferring to learn for herself rather than turn to the manuals or guides. During intervals between meals the kitchen stove was covered with vessels of all sizes, for brews and stews were in the process of making, and the queerest odors filled the house, until she felt she might be wrong.

The work progressed, the neighbors grew interested and new forms and colors came into being. It was so satisfactory that when put on the market they met with ready results. In fact, a wholesaler to whom she went for goods asked her how large her plant was and where her operatives lived. Her answer was: "I have none, but I send to various workers within a radius of six miles. A worker comes and receives material and instructions; the rug is made in her own home during rest hours and is brought back completed."

The work has been a labor of love, but through it all has come an evolution of the ugly rag mat which has brought to people of limited means a capital which they had not dreamed of.

This rag mat industry, which was started in New Hampshire, has progressed most rapidly. The patterns, many of them taken from nature, have been readily adapted as they are given to the people in right colors. They are taught how to color their rags the size of the strips, how to fasten them together and even the necessity of hunting the market for short lengths at reasonable prices in order to get a greater variety of color.

When it was found the success that this rag mat industry had accomplished and the demand became greater than one was able to fill, it came to Mrs. Albee that she should enlarge the sphere, often sending handicraft maidens, to whom she had taught both process and art of coloring out into other towns that they might collect around them a new set of workers who would be benefited by this new idea.

The Jam Girl, the Strad Girl and the Girl Who Paints—By Faith Hunter Dodge

THE "Jam Girl" is her nickname at home, because a girl at home and a prophet in his own country never receive all the homage due them; a "Bouguereau" they called her at the College of the Pacific, because of her wonderful talent in painting; but some one, I think it was Leoncavallo, gave her the title which has stuck when he dubbed her the "Girl Stradivarius."

In her San Jose garden Grace Barstow earned all three titles. Her mother tells how from twisted fig trees and sturdy apricots in that garden she gathered fruit which she converted into marmalade and jam, winning first prizes at county affairs. Then she sat before her easel and painted landscapes which breathe the breath of California—hillsides flaming with yellows and burnt blues, bricks and oranges; these alone would have given her fame. But visions of greater things came to Grace Barstow in her wonderful old garden.

When she was a very little girl, just learning to play the violin, she got the idea—"from where, I don't know," she says—that she could make violins herself. The beautiful wood of the great redwoods growing just outside the garden fascinated her always.

"It seemed to mesmerize me," she recalls with a far-off happy look in her eyes. "It seemed to want to make music like my violin. And often we would take turns, the redwoods with the wind playing through their leaves and branches, and I with my little violin, singing the same songs. We had wonderful duets and splendid times together. Even the birds joined in and the early morning heard strange orchestral harmonies."

SHE was only eight when her brother had a complete work bench made for her and set it up in the corner of the garden. There were two strong vises on it—"for vises," she contends, "are virtues in violin making." Together brother and sister scoured the town for tools and accumulated chisels, saws, mallets, planes, clamps, calipers, ebony keys, purfling and glue and varnish. There was even a very successful varnish made from the gum of the fig trees in the garden—for this girl, like Amati, tried everything in her little violin factory.

Her grandmother then saw that the project was a serious one, so she sent to Europe for pine and maple wood—enough for several violins. There were months of steady, grinding work with a very good teacher. Then the first violin was finished.

Out in the garden under the fig trees it sang its first sweet notes at dawn; and a nightingale came out and answered it.

But a little girl neighbor borrowed it to practice on. And brought it home with a cracked back.

The girl violin maker went to work again, this time alone; and progressed, she admits, "through many trials and tribulations."

Grace Barstow, a versatile girl

"It seems that almost every one who makes violins has to get a certain number of freak ideas about shapes, sizes and thicknesses of instruments out of their systems," says Miss Barstow. "I tried them all. But my chief obsession was to use the wood from my own trees. With that exception I finally settled down to conventional lines, those established by Stradivarius and Amati, and did my best to make good-toned violins.

"But as Montaigne says of Aristotle, 'he will still have a hand in everything.' I could not withstand the temptation to busy myself with the unconventional woods. I tried our California redwood. The first results were terrifying. 'What! Do those tones come blowing through the tiny pores of the redwood, down through the ages, from life beyond the glacial period, when human man was perhaps not yet developed from the ape? Is it the voice of nature speaking to us from the days of old?' This, you can imagine, was my own secret question and my brother's open comment.

"The garden, at times, besides weird noises, would give a general appearance of awe-inspiring chaos—the sort that causes a good housekeeper to develop brainstorm. Shavings, shavings everywhere, shavings which had a monster grip on the rug spread out under the work bench, shavings which could not be beguiled by a busy broom.

"In spite of which there is a great deal about violin making which is nice and poetical—everything except the glue pot. Somehow the odor of romance simply does not linger round pans and glue pots. And the clothespins which clamped on the purfling were more useful than ornamental!

"YES, and one day I remarked to my mother that I had to sandpaper my neck. She was quite aghast, until I discovered the reason for her displeasure and explained that it was my violin neck which needed the operation."

And these prosaic hurdles back to earth notwithstanding, Grace Barstow went on dreaming of a redwood violin with low, vibrant, mellow tones and exquisite harmonies. "Redwood is too soft," was the verdict of every one who watched her brave attempts; and the redwood she was using was too soft. But out in her grandfather's fence—for her garden is a part of Judge Rhodes's estate and Judge Rhodes was her mother's father—she found a rough old slab of redwood which had been aging nearly fifty years in the California sunshine. She tested it and found it hard and ripe and beautifully grained. From that old slab she made the bass bar and sounding board of the violin she is holding in the photograph. This she calls her violin No. 6 and it is her favorite; she has played on it hundreds of times in public and before the "great" of the land.

But to this day the audience she loves best—though it never claps its hands—is the row of redwood trees and eucalyptus just outside the garden; the fig trees and the apricots in the orchestra seats and the birds which warble and trill their approval from the leafy galleries.

OTHER violins have followed this one, violins with redwood tops and deep voices like the voice of the cello, violins with entire sides of redwood and tops of maple with ingeniously fashioned inlays and scrolls. "Every one of them has its own personality," affirms their maker, "as plainly visible to me as the characteristics of human beings."

But the violins are all packed now in big cases. Grace Barstow and her mother are preparing to leave the fine old home and the historic garden. They are going south to live in a great, new home being built in Los Angeles next to the home of Grace's brother, now an attorney, whose avocation, by the way, is playing the cello in duets with his sister and her violin to piano accompaniments played by their mother.

The trees seem to understand. The eucalyptus sheds its perfume softly like a censer in a temple; the redwoods moan and the pepper trees bow their heads disconsolately; the wind sighs through the leaves and branches of the twisted fig trees. The bullfinch and the lark sing through the morning light; the swallows twitter dismally at noon, and in the starry hours of the night the nightingale trills its saddest song in the old San Jose garden.